

IN - 7

HAER  
IND,  
21-CONVI,  
6 -

Connersville Industrial Park  
Connersville  
Fayette County  
Indiana

Photographs and  
Written and Historic data  
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Engineering Record  
National Park Service  
Department of Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

Connersville Industrial Park

HAER IN-7

Location:	Connersville, Indiana. UTM: 16.659390.4390.760. Quad: Anderson, South.
Date of Construction:	1886
Present Owner:	
Significance:	The Connersville Industrial Park was organized by John B. McFarland, an established carriage manufacturer who convinced his suppliers to build their factories on his property. As the automobile usurped the place of the carriage, the Connersville Industrial Park became an important center of automobile manufacture.
Historians:	Robert Rosenberg Donald Sackheim

It is understood that access to this material rests on the condition that should any of it be used in any form or by any means, the author of such material and the Historic American Engineering Record of the National Park Service at all times be given proper credit.

The Connersville Industrial Park was organized in 1886 by John B. McFarland and his Connersville Land and Improvement Company. After gaining control of several small carriage companies, McFarland built a factory to house his new company on the property and then began to promote the land as an industrial park. His plan was to draw manufacturers of buggy and carriage equipment to the park, centralize supply and manufacture, and thereby benefit himself and others involved in the industry.

Several features of the park insured its success. Canal and railroad, the principal means of transporting industrial goods in the 19th century, formed the eastern boundry of the park. By providing water power and inexpensive transportation of bulk products, the Whitewater Canal attracted Connersville's first industry. The Canal, begun during the hightide of canal construction in 1832, reached Connersville in 1845. The Cleveland, Cincinnati, and Chicago and St. Louis Railroad(now the Central Indiana Railroad) which reached Connersville in 1850 drew more industry to the city as it joined Connersville to the national transportation web. McFarland himself provided an additional incentive for manufacturers to locate in his park when he organized a natural gas company to supply the area with inexpensive fuel. The Connersville Natural Gas Company incorporated in 1889 and tapped the gas fields around Carthage, Indiana to pipe gas south to the Connersville Industrial Park.

The Connersville Furniture Company (see HAER IN-12), established in 1832, was the first factory in the park. Initially it was located in a 50' x 150' building on the east side of Illinois Street near the intersection of Mount Street. The location was important since the company's first product--black walnut bedroom suites--was machine produced using power drawn from the canal. In 1892 an addition to the plant was built across Illinois Street. Francis M. Root, organizer of the Roots Blower Company, was the first president of the firm.

The Munk and Roberts Furniture Company factory (see HAER IN-14), later to become the Rex Buggy Company factory, erected a four-story structure in 1878 and a five-story brick factory in 1883 near the intersection of Western Avenue on the east side of the canal and 15th Street. Apparently it was built on the site to make use of water power, as did the Connersville Furniture Company on the east side.

The Rex Buggy Company purchased the 15th Street and Western building in 1898. The Company, incorporated on 11 November 1898, manufactured Rex and Yale buggies. In 1916 the company changed its name to the Rex Manufacturing Company, and with the passing of the buggy era, the company began the manufacture of tops and enclosures for automobiles.

The McFarland Carriage Company (see HAER IN-8), established in 1857, was moved to the park by John McFarland in 1887. McFarland located his new factory on Mount Street opposite Columbia. The four-story structure, 275' long, fronted on Mount Street. Two ells at right angles to the main building and parallel to each other ran to the south. After the factory was built, McFarland approached other buggy manufacturers to join him in the park. E. W. Ansted, a

manufacturer of buggy springs, was among the first to join McFarland and eventually Ansted-owned factories dominated the park.

The Ansted-Higgins Spring Company (see HAER IN-9), established in the park in 1891, was the first business enterprise of E.W. Ansted in Connersville. Ansted, who later organized five plants for the manufacture of automobile parts, located his spring plant along Columbia Avenue just north of Mount Street. The original structure was 180' x 230'. In 1895 the spring company was merged with an axle works, and the name was changed to the Ansted Spring and Axle Works.

The Connersville Blower Company (see HAER IN-13), was located on Columbia Avenue near the Mount Street intersection. The building was approximately 600' x 100'. John McFarland, its first president, apparently helped organize the enterprise in order to compete against Roots Blower Company, another Connersville manufacturer.

The Central Manufacturing Company (see HAER IN-10), incorporated by Ansted in 1898, was organized to manufacture vehicle woodwork. In 1903 it began the manufacture of automobile bodies. The first plant, located at 123 West 7th Street, was destroyed by fire in 1905 and in 1906 a building 620' x 60' was erected north of 18th Street bordering the canal.

In 1907 the company began manufacturing metal auto bodies and a building 142' x 76' was constructed. In 1908 an addition 236' x 76' was built on the north side and in 1910 another addition 240' x 76' was built on the south end. In 1912 an addition to the south end 192' x 76' brought the entire length of this single building to 810 x 76'. In 1913 a blacksmith shop, 150' x 40', and a building 240' x 60' were built for the metal buggy and press departments. By 1915 the firm had 150,000 square feet of space.

The Rex Wheel Works, or the Connersville Wheel Works, was organized by Ansted in 1900. Its first location was along 18th Street near Columbia to the east of the building adjacent to the Lexington Motor Company. It is not shown in the drawing.

The George R. Carter Company, not shown on the map, was located on the northeast corner of 16th and Kentucky. The Carter Company manufactured upholstery goods for the carriage trade and the automobile companies. It became a division of the Vogt Manufacturing Corporation of Detroit on 1 January 1929. The Connersville Casket Company took over the building on 25 May 1934.

The Indiana Lamp Company, another Ansted-owned parts factory established in 1904, initially was located immediately north of the Ansted Spring and Axle Company at Columbia and Mount Streets. In 1916 the plant was moved to the Ansted factory block to the north of 18th Street. It manufactured headlamps for buggies and automobiles.

The Lexington Motor Company (see HAER IN-11), first housed in a barn in Lexington, Kentucky, was established in 1909 by Kinsey Stone, a local promoter and horse racer. In 1910, after a discussion with a group of Connersville businessmen, Stone moved his company to more suitable quarters at 18th and Columbia in the Connersville Industrial Park. With the help of his chief engineer, John C. Moore, Stone developed the Lexington automobile.

The company was plagued by financial problems and in 1913 the Lexington Motor Company was acquired by E.W. Ansted. The manufacture of the Lexington Automobile formed the backbone of the Ansted automobile empire. The automobile underwent several model changes and numerous engineering improvements while the various components--frame, top, woodwork, body, and engine block--were manufactured in Ansted-owned subsidiary plants. In 1914, the firm was changed to the Lexington-Howard Company. The Howard Distributing Company requested the manufacture of a large six cylinder touring car, the Howard, and when it was discontinued after 8 months the name of the firm was changed back to the Lexington Automobile Company.

The U.S. Automobile Corporation, formed during the fall of 1919, was a \$10 million preferred stock corporation which acted as a holding company for various Ansted-owned enterprises: the Ansted Engine Company, the Connersville Foundry Corporation, and the Lexington Automobile Corporation. The property of the Lexington Automobile Company, along with the Ansted Engineering Company, went into receivership in April 1923. The Lexington Automobile factory was finally sold to Bigger and Better Connersville, a civic group, in November 1926. After a series of corporate moves the plant was bought by the Aburn Automobile Company in 1927.

The factory changed substantially during the lifetime of the Lexington Automobile Company. The original brick and frame two-story structure, built in 1910, was on the northeast corner of Columbia and 18th Streets. A small 40' x 32' addition was added to the north end of the structure and in 1911 a 21' x 125' wood-framed addition to the plant was joined northwest of the original structure. Two factories were erected north of the original one: a structure in 1913 and a large 900' x 100' building in 1919.

Another Ansted enterprise, the Hoosier Casting Company, was organized in 1915 to manufacture engine blocks and other medium-weight cast products. The foundry was located at 18th and Columbia Streets in a building taken over from the Connersville Fireproof Safe Company.

The Ansted Engine Company was organized in April 1918 when the Ansted family acquired the Teter-Hartly Motor Corporation of Hagerstown, Indiana. Maintaining the Hagerstown operation, the company built a new plant in Connersville north of the Lexington Automobile works. The firm manufactured automobile engines until it went into receivership in 1926.

Many of the large automobile factories in the Connersville Industrial Park were acquired by E.L. Cord's Aburn Automobile Company in the late 1920's (see HAER IN-11). Following the sale of Cord's interests in Connersville, many of the plants that had been constructed for automobile production were converted to general industrial use. The industrial park, which had begun with the infant automobile industry, acquired a diverse nature as the industry matured.

Connersville Industrial Park

Bibliography

Blommel, Henry H. Indiana's Little Detroit, 1846-1964.  
Connersville: 1964. Mimeographed booklet.